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AUTHOR Chun, Dorothy M.
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the intonational patterns used by women and men at the ends of utterances for the purpose of managing discourse. The research sought to describe how intonation helps to signal that a speaker is through speaking and desires a response or reaction from the listener, or that the speaker is not through with a turn and wishes to keep the floor. The model incorporates the concepts of both discourse intonation and turn-taking. Data were drawn from the relatively formal natural speech in panel discussions taped from German television. Analysis does not substantiate the claim that women use more rising intonation than men, and suggests that the discourse context of utterances is of utmost importance in analyzing intonational features, regardless of the speaker's gender. No instances of inappropriate rising question intonation were found, but the use of less low-falling terminal intonation by women than men supports the theory of gender-different strategies for speech action. Further cross-cultural research on intonation patterns, especially from the perceptual perspective, and on pitch range and dynamism are recommended. (MSE)

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HOW WOMEN VS. MEN MANAGE DISCOURSE: TURN-TAKING IN GERMAN

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1. Introduction

The work by Lakoff (1973) "Language and Women's Place" was the groundbreaker for linguistic and sociolinguistic studies on gender differences in women's vs. men's language.[1] In the last decade and a half, numerous studies have been done to determine empirically whether Lakoff's claims that women's speech differs from men's are true. The majority of these studies have been done with English and have shown mixed results: a few support her claims, while the majority seem to refute them.[2] One of the characteristics of women's speech which Lakoff had listed and which has not been studied to as great an extent as the others is the more prevalent use of rising question intonation, i.e., women are said to use rising pitches at the ends of both questions as well as statements, whereas men use more falling intonation, especially with statements.[3]

In this paper, I examine some empirical data from German television discussions and find that women do not use more rising intonation than men and that men use virtually as much sustained or slightly rising intonation as women do, when it serves the discoursal purpose of keeping the floor. Lakoff had claimed that rising question intonation conveys and is perceived as indecisiveness, insecurity, and inappropriate politeness or deference, all of which reflect women's lack of authority or power. However, an appealing alternative was suggested by McConnell-Ginet (1975 and 1983), namely, that rising intonation has diverse social functions, and that while rising finals may indicate uncertainty, women also use rises for pragmatic purposes, e.g. to get attention, to engage another in conversation, to invite response -- in

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general, as a strategic move "to insure continuation of the on-going verbal interaction."[4] My German data in fact corroborate this notion that a primary function of intonation is to indicate how an utterance "fits" in a discourse, i.e. what the speaker is doing by means of uttering a particular sentence in a particular context. Since the data show that both men and women use comparable percentages of both clause-final rising and sustained contours, it thus appears that discourse factors sometimes outweigh or override gender differences.

2. Background

Research on gender differences and intonation is most fruitfully undertaken from an interdisciplinary perspective, e.g. sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, or ethnolinguistics (i.e. the study of the relationship of language to anthropological or cultural influences). There are basically two kinds of studies: first, studies dealing with the production aspects of speech, which involve collecting and analyzing samples of intonation in real speech, and second, studies dealing with the perceptual aspects of speech, e.g. how different intonations are perceived, what different intonational patterns are thought to mean, or what is perceived as feminine vs. masculine speech. Researchers generally agree that "the perceptions of sex-related differences are actually more important than absolute differences"[5] and that "beliefs about language production are not necessarily in one-to-one correspondence with actual language production."[6] In other words, judgments about language are very much tied to conventionally established social and cultural norms and contexts. While my own work will ultimately encompass both the production and the perceptual aspects, I will only be reporting here on initial work which deals with the production aspect of intonation in natural discourse.

Based on the many studies that have appeared since Lakoff's provocative work in 1973 (most of which deal with English), the general consensus is that the grammatical differences, i.e. the syntactic and lexical differences between women's and men's speech are not as great as Lakoff had originally claimed.[7] With regard to intonation, however, studies have suggested that these prosodic differences "may be a more crucial variable in production and interpretation or evaluation of sex-differentiated language than is variation in lexicon, phonology, or syntax."[8] Unfortunately for German, much less has been done on women's language in general, and there is a real dearth of studies dealing with intonation in particular.[9]

Lakoff (1975:102) had claimed that women "speak in italics," i.e., that they use frequent and extreme pitch shifts. Studies from the United States and England do indeed indicate that women use a larger range of pitch and a greater variety of intonational patterns than men. From the perceptual standpoint, research has shown that the use of dynamic intonational patterns, i.e. frequent or sharp changes in pitch, are stereotypically associated with women or femininity,[10] and femininity, in turn, is characterized as deferential, polite, inquisitive, emotional or excitable.[11]

Takefuta, Jancosek and Brunt (1972) recorded 12 women and 12 men reading 10 sentences; the subjects were instructed to use as many different intonations as they could think of. Acoustical measures of these recordings revealed that the women used a much wider range of pitch than the men did (nearly twice as wide), and that the women's pitch shifts had a much sharper gradient than the men's, i.e. they exhibited greater intonational dynamism.

In a study by Edelsky (1979) "Question intonation and sex roles," she focussed explicitly on whether more women than men used rising intonation when answering two questions to which only they had the answer ("Where were you born?" "What is your favorite color?").[12] She found that both sexes used

straight rising intonation rarely but equally, thus refuting Lakoff's claims that women use rising question intonation "inappropriately," as in her "classic" example:

Husband: "When will dinner be ready?"

Wife: "Six o'clock?" <said with rising pitch>

However, Edelsky suggests that when the women in her study did use rising intonation, it was often in an attempt to facilitate the interview or to continue the interaction, rather than to imply timidity or one of the stereotypically feminine traits of uncertainty, less authoritativeness, and need for reassurance.

Thus, an important observation Edelsky makes in the discussion of her data is that it is imperative to take into account the context or situation in which data is collected. In this point, she echoes similar admonitions expressed by Crosby & Nyquist (1977:320), whose results suggest that "differences between women's speech and men's speech are, to some degree, context specific" and further, that "role differences rather than status differences are represented by or expressed through differentiation of the sort constituting a female register."[13]

3. My Study

The focus of my study is the intonational patterns used by women and men at the ends of utterances for the purpose of managing discourse. The goal is a preliminary description or model of how intonation helps to signal that a speaker is through speaking and desires a response or reaction from the listener or that the speaker is not through with a turn and wishes to keep the floor. It is thus necessary to incorporate into the model the ideas of discourse intonation[14] and turn-taking[15], two areas of research which deal with utterances within their larger domain rather than with utterances

isolated or extracted from the context in which they occurred. Other factors, some linguistic and others non-linguistic, which play a role in the process of turn-taking, include the following but will not be considered here: syntactic features, use of certain lexical items, kinesic features, and interruptions.[16]

My data consist of natural (i.e. not elicited) speech from panel discussions taped from German television; these data are thus taken from a relatively "formal" situation and not from informal, everyday conversation. As part of an extensive collection of natural spoken German collected by the Institute for German Language in Mannheim, West Germany (formerly in Freiburg), this data corpus has been the primary source of much of the linguistic research done on the contemporary spoken language in Germany, but virtually nothing has been done on intonation, much less discourse intonation.[17] Since most of the data were collected in the 1960's and 1970's, many of the television discussions consisted of all-male panels. Two, in which women took part, will be considered here. One of them, taped in 1971, was an 11-minute excerpt of a discussion by 7 television moderators, 6 men and 1 woman, about the role of a moderator. The second, a longer discussion of 33 minutes taped in 1963, was actually a question and answer session between a prominent German author, Gnter Grass, and a group of high school students, 4 females and 8 males.

Although the data have not yet been subjected to instrumental analyses, a preliminary auditory analysis indicates that in both of these discussions, the overall intonation used by the females was no more dynamic than that used by the males, i.e. the women did not use more frequent or sharper pitch shifts than the men. While acoustic phonetic analyses will certainly help to quantify the parameters of intonation, auditory analyses are of some value, since our perceptual capabilities as human beings allow us to process and

comprehend these signals for every utterance that we hear or speak. Furthermore, Edelsky (1979:28) also cautions that even when intonational differences are found, "there may not be a simple relationship between production, interpretation/ evaluation, and perpetuation of stereotypes or hierarchical status."

In an earlier study I discussed the intonation used in telephone conversations from the same German corpus and found that more than half of the turn-ends, i.e. the point of smooth speaker transitions where the speaker stops of her/his own accord and is not interrupted, did not exhibit the low falling patterns which are said to be characteristic of English,[18] and particularly male speech. Rather, 60% of the utterances ended either with falling or sustained contours whose final pitch was in the middle of the speaker's range rather than at the bottom. It appears thus that non-low, falling terminal contours are capable of representing turn-ends in German, and that this non-low pitch signals that the speaker desires or is waiting for a response; in other words, the turn may have ended but not the interaction or discourse. In contrast, however, low, falling intonation more definitely appears to signal to the listener that the speaker is through speaking, because following such terminal contours, listeners would begin to speak, often simultaneously with the first speaker, who apparently was not ready to relinquish the floor.

Similarly, in the first discussion of the present study, only slightly more than half of the utterances at turn-end (11 of 19 or 58%) exhibited a final contour which fell to a low pitch. (See Table 1.) Accompanying these low-falling contours were always both a general fading of intensity and pitch as well as a pause. For the remaining 8 of the 19 utterances (42%), the intonational contour at turn-end was characterized by either 1) a sustained contour at mid level or 2) a slightly falling pitch after the stressed

syllable, which fell not to a low pitch, but rather to a mid pitch. In addition, pauses occurred at the end of the utterance, suggesting that the speaker was ready and willing to relinquish the floor. This corroborates the hypothesis of my previous study of German, i.e., that contrary to what has been found for English, non-low falling terminals in German can signal a turn-end. However, while it seems that more than one type of intonation can occur at the end of a speaker's turn --particularly when coupled with other features, such as pause or syntactic structure-- the various non-low contours serve the discoursal function of signalling that the speaker desires or expects a response of some kind. Of note in this case is that syntactically, only one of these 8 utterances was an interrogative.

TABLE 1. Intonation Contours at Turn End: Discussion #1.

	Low-falling	Mid-falling	Mid-sustained
Female	3 of 5 (60%)	2 of 5 (40%)	0 of 5 (0%)
Male	8 of 14 (58%)	3 of 14 (21%)	3 of 14 (21%)
Totals	11 of 19 (58%)	5 of 19 (26%)	3 of 19 (16%)

There was no significant difference between the woman's patterns and the men's, i.e. both used approximately equal numbers of low-falling as well as mid-falling and mid-sustained contours, but no one, neither female nor male, used a final high-rising contour. These preliminary results do not support Lakoff's claims and suggest furthermore that men use a fairly high percentage of non-low falling terminal contours, contrary to what is stereotypically believed.

In the second, longer discussion, the discourse situation was quite

different in that the participants did not enjoy equal social status. Somewhat less than half of the turn-ends (25 of 53 or 47%) consisted of questions directed to the guest of honor, and, as would be expected, more rising and sustained patterns were used with the questions. For the 7 "tag" questions, rising intonation was used for all of the tags, whether uttered by males or females. For the 12 yes-no questions, sustained, rising, or non-low falling patterns were used for 7 of them, with comparable use by females and males. However, low-falling contours, an unusual pattern for yes-no questions, were used with 5 of them, notably all spoken by males. (See Table 2.) Among the wh-questions, all 6 of them exhibited use of falling intonation, a common contour for such questions, but in half of them, the pitch did not fall to a low level, rather only to a mid level. In terms of discourse intonation, the use of non-low pitch can function to encourage continuation of the discussion. The use of the low-falling patterns for the 5 yes-no questions can be explained as signalling that the speaker was through with his question and ready to relinquish the floor to the addressee; in the context of this question/answer format, it was not necessary for the questioners to signal intonationally that their utterances were interrogatives.

TABLE 2. Intonation Contours of Yes-No Questions at Turn-End: Discussion #2.

	Low-falling	Mid-falling	Mid-sustained or rising
Females	0 of 3 (0%)	0 of 3 (0%)	3 of 3 (100%)
Males	5 of 9 (56%)	2 of 9 (22%)	2 of 9 (22%)
Totals	5 of 12 (42%)	2 of 12 (16%)	5 of 12 (42%)

The remaining 28 utterances at turn-end were statements, most often directed at the author, but in a few cases in response to a fellow classmate. Of the 18 statements made by males, 50% of them were intoned with low-falling contours (a typical percentage for the German data from this corpus), while none of the 10 statements made by females showed this pattern. The other 50% of the males' statements, as well as all of the females' utterances, made use of a mid-falling or a sustained contour. (See Table 3.) The more frequent use by the women of such non-low falling patterns (but not rising patterns) provides some measure of support for McConnell-Ginet's hypothesis that women use intonation for the discourse function of inviting response.

TABLE 3. Intonation Contours of Statements at Turn-End: Discussion #2.

	Low-falling	Mid-falling	Mid-sustained
Females	0 of 10 (0%)	5 of 10 (50%)	5 of 10 (50%)
Males	9 of 18 (50%)	7 of 18 (39%)	2 of 18 (11%)
Totals	9 of 28 (32%)	12 of 28 (43%)	7 of 28 (25%)

The most striking feature, however, that was observed in all of the data, was the use by both the males and the females of far fewer low-falling contours at the ends of clauses and statements in the middle of turns than might stereotypically be expected, particularly for the males. For example, in the first discussion, of a total of 78 declarative sentences, only 16 statements (21%) ended with a low-falling pitch; the remainder ended with mid-falling or sustained contours. (See Table 4.) Similarly, at the ends of mid-sentence clauses, the majority of which were subordinate clauses, only 5

clauses out of 86 (6%) ended with a low-falling pitch, while the remainder ended with rising or sustained contours. (See Table 5.) Although this might be explained in part by the differences in intonation between English and German, namely that German tends to use more sustained contours, particularly at the end of subordinate clauses,[19] this also suggests strong support for the claim that intonation can serve to signal that a speaker is not ready or willing to relinquish the floor. Furthermore, the prevalent use of non-low falling intonation by both men and women suggests that this discourse function of intonation crosses gender boundaries.

TABLE 4. Intonation Contours of Declaratives at Sentence-End: Discussion #1.

	Low-falling	Mid-falling	Mid-sustained or rising
Female	1 of 4 (25%)	3 of 4 (75%)	0 of 4 (0%)
Males	15 of 74 (20%)	38 of 74 (52%)	21 of 74 (28%)
Totals	16 of 78 (21%)	41 of 78 (53%)	21 of 78 (26%)

TABLE 5. Intonation Contours of Declaratives at Clause-End: Discussion #1.

	Low-falling	Mid-falling	Mid-sustained or rising
Female	0 of 3 (0%)	2 of 3 (67%)	1 of 3 (33%)
Male	5 of 83 (6%)	18 of 83 (22%)	60 of 83 (72%)
Totals	5 of 86 (6%)	20 of 86 (23%)	61 of 86 (71%)

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, these data suggest, first of all, that the claim by Lakoff that women use more rising intonation than men is not to be substantiated by data from formal discussions in German, and second, that the discourse context in which utterances are made is of utmost importance when analyzing intonational features, regardless of the gender of the speaker. Virtually no instances of Lakoff's inappropriate rising question intonation were found, but the use of less low-falling terminal intonation by women than men appears to support McConnell-Ginet's (1983:83) suggestion that "women and men will typically use different patterns for equivalent situations because they have different strategies for speech action." Studies have shown that women have to "work harder" to keep interactions going,[20] and my data show that intonation is an important tool that aids in the negotiating process, i.e., non-low falling contours do not signal the finality that low-falling contours do, but rather may serve to ensure continuation of the discourse or interaction. Furthermore, the fact that men also frequently use non-low falling and sustained patterns in order to achieve the discourse strategy of holding the floor necessitates further cross-cultural research, especially from the perceptual perspective, to determine whether these intonational patterns are perceived differently when used by a woman than when used by a man. In addition, instrumental measurements of pitch range and pitch dynamism will bring us a step further in understanding the complex yet powerful phenomena of intonation in human speech.

Dorothy M. Chun
The University of Texas at Austin

NOTES

1. Lakoff's claims about the sex differences in men and women's language use are summarized, for example, in Philips (1980:532): (1) Women use vocabulary items that men do not use, e.g. "mauve." (2) Women use more "empty" adjectives, like "divine," "cute," and "sweet." (3) Women use question forms (and question intonation) where men would use declaratives. (4) Women use more polite forms, like "please" and "thank you." (5) Women use more "hedges," or forms that convey uncertainty, e.g. "well," "you know," "kinda," "I think," "I wonder." (6) Women use the intensifiers more frequently, e.g. "so," "very," "really." (7) Women use more "hypercorrect" grammar.

2. There are several excellent reviews of the literature, e.g., see Philips (1980), Smith (1985), and the annotated bibliographies by Thorne and Henley (1975), Jarrard & Randall (1982), and Thorne, Kramarae & Henley (1983).

3. For very good introductory studies on intonation, see Edelsky (1979) and McConnell-Ginet (1983).

4. The quote is from McConnell-Ginet (1975:45), but see also her article (1983:83) for her view of the functions of intonation.

5. McConnell-Ginet (1975:47) states, "A high-pitched but relatively level intonation sounds, coming from a man, less 'effeminate' than low-pitched male speech that uses the long glides and great range of pitches associated with the woman's way of talking." See also McConnell-Ginet (1983:74).

There is also acoustic data from studies which tend to support these stereotypes, but most of these data bases are not large enough to permit firm conclusions. See, e.g. Terrango (1966), who did a study of 14 male voices,

half of which were rated as very effeminate and half as very masculine. Only two of the eight acoustical measures distinguished effeminate from masculine voices. The first feature was the mean fundamental frequency: the mean f_o for the masculine voices (100 Hz) was lower than the norm for American men (127 Hz), but the mean for the effeminate voices was 127 Hz, not higher than average. The second feature was the degree of pitch movement: those speakers characterized as effeminate had steeper pitch shift gradients than the masculine speakers, whose average gradient was similar to the average American male's. He concluded that intonational dynamism is clearly associated with femininity, at least in the United States, while low pitch seems to be an important feature of stereotypical masculinity.

6. Edelsky (1979:17) is referring here to work by Kramer (1973), but states herself, "Physical signals...do not always correlate with perceived intonation, and it is perceived intonation that affects social judgments." (p. 28)

7. Philips (1980:539) states, "...we have little evidence of a co-occurrence of syntactic and phonological features in the differentiation of men and women's speech" and discusses studies which support this statement.

8. See McConnell-Ginet (1975:47) who states that when male speakers imitate females, the characteristics that are usually exaggerated or exploited are pitch and stress variations far more than vocabulary, syntax or even absolute average pitch.

McConnell-Ginet (1978) did a "matched-guise" experiment in which the same voice was heard in different "guises," and the critical tokens were interspersed among several distractor voices. In her study, five different females and five males were recorded responding to the question "When will dinner be ready?" in each of two intonation patterns: the "neutral-fall" tone

and the "high-rise" that Lakoff described as stereotypical of women. Listeners were asked to rate the sentences on 16 personality scales. The high-rise intonation was rated as more hesitant, sympathetic, emotional and sociable than the neutral-fall, regardless of speaker sex. The neutral-fall was generally found to be more aggressive, decisive, assertive and dominant, again, whether spoken by women or men. "These two clusters of traits very nearly epitomize, respectively, stereotypical femininity and stereotypical masculinity," and intonation was found to be "a fairly strong determinant of attributions of femininity and masculinity."

9. See, however, Klann (1978), Trömel-Plötz (1982), and Werner (1983).

10. One can find definite intuitive descriptions of what is typically masculine or typically feminine speech. Crystal (1971), for example, described so-called "effeminate" speech impressionistically as having a broader than normal pitch range, sliding tones between syllables, frequent use of dynamic pitch changes, and occasional switches to falsetto voice.

In an acoustic study, Aronovitch (1976) measured 6 objective parameters of spontaneous speech and also had listeners rate the samples on 10 personality scales. He reported that there were no differences between the personality ratings given by male and female listeners, but the pattern of intercorrelations between vocal parameters and personality ratings depended on the sex of the speaker. Edelsky (1979:17), in summarizing his study, states that he "found that among other factors, pitch variability was used as a cue for evaluating personalities of males, while average pitch was used to evaluate females; i.e. that a double standard exists vis-a-vis interpretation of intonational factors."

11. McConnell-Ginet (1975:48) states that "Pitch variability is also heard as emotional or excitable and is, I argue, to some extent constitutive of our impression of women's emotionality."

See also Brend (1975) who reported on her own informal observations that female speakers use "more polite" intonation patterns with a wider pitch range while men use more "deliberative" patterns with a narrower range of pitch. She further observed that women use certain patterns that men usually do not, particularly high-low down-glides which express "unexpectedness" or "surprise" and non-final or sustained patterns which express "implication" or hesitation.

12. Edelsky's evidence did not validate Lakoff's intuitions that women use more rising question intonation than men. As for listeners' reactions, she found: (1979:25)

a. The falling contour elicited the most stereotypically masculine association on each of 7 personality attributes, and the simple rise was perceived as most stereotypically feminine (more submissive, warmer, less aggressive, etc.).

b. Sex of speaker affected the assigned ratings on five of the attributes, with female voices heard as less confident, less competent, more easily influenced, less dominant, and less objective, regardless of the intonation pattern used.

See also pp. 20-21 for additional responses of subjects which indicated how critical the surrounding discourse and context are.

13. See, in addition, McConnell-Ginet (1983:81), who warns against a common linguistic practice of extracting language from the social context in which it occurred and also neglecting the cultural or historical background.

14. For representative studies of discourse intonation, see, e.g. Brazil (1975, 1978), Coulthard and Brazil (1981), and Johns-Lewis (1986).

15. For an introduction to the phenomenon of turn-taking, see, for example, Sachs et al (1974), Duncan (1972, 1974, 1977), Beattie (1981).

16. For studies on kinesics see, e.g. Kendon (1967, 1972); for a sample

of work on interruptions, see, e.g. Zimmerman and West (1975), West & Zimmerman (1983).

17. There are approximately 10,000 recordings of spoken German, totalling 9,000 hours. Transcriptions used for my data are found in Texte gesprochener deutscher Standardsprache, Vols. II/1 and II/2. See also Hang (1976).

18. See Chun (1986) and also Brend (1975:86-87), who claimed that in English, men are said to "avoid final patterns which do not terminate at the lowest level of pitch, and use a final, short upstep only for special effects, for incomplete sequence, and for certain interrogative sentences."

In addition, see Elyan (1977), who found that in taped monologues, males used a higher percentage of falls than females, who used more equal proportions of rising and falling tones.

19. See Delattre (1965).

20. See Fishman (1983). Another cultural difference that has existed historically in our (and other) societies, is that women have traditionally dealt more with children and perhaps have needed to attract and hold children's attention by means of changing pitch and loudness frequently. A study of the speech of fathers to their children, i.e. fathers who are as involved as mothers in childrearing, would probably yield interesting information.

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